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Letter dated 21 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a statement issued today, 21 August, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea regarding Ethiopia's gross violation of human rights (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 116 (a) and (d), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Haile **Menkerios**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 21 August 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

21 August 2000

Ethiopia's gross violation of human rights can never be whitewashed

It is a matter of public record that, as a result of Ethiopia's expansionist designs, a simple border dispute that could have been resolved by peaceful means has ended up being the biggest war in Africa. This tragic war has incurred enormous destruction and the loss of precious lives.

What is perhaps more painful is the negative and long-term impact on the hitherto solid relationship of the two brotherly people's caused by Ethiopia's deliberate and calculated policy of ethnic hatred. As has been documented, this has resulted in the wilful persecution of ethnic Eritreans in Ethiopia throughout the past two years, the overwhelming majority of whom have been deported with the confiscation of their life-long earnings; many have died in prison under torture; thousands more are missing and others continue to languish in the Dedesa and other concentration camps.

These gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law were not unavoidable occurrences associated with war. They were rather the products of a deliberate and calculated ethnic policy. In fact, they were invoked and articulated by none other than the Ethiopian Prime Minister who, only two years ago, justified the illegal — and indeed immoral — persecution of ethnic Eritreans in the face of international disapprobation. In an official interview, the Prime Minister declared: "Ethiopia has the sovereign right to expel anyone the colour of whose eyes it did not like" and that "his government's action was no different from what the United States Government was doing to Mexicans".

Ethiopia's gross violation of basic humanitarian and international law have intensified in the past three months, especially in the sovereign Eritrean territories it continues to occupy following the invasion that it launched last May. As the following facts illustrate, the regime:

- Extended its policy of ethnic cleansing to expel 15,000 Eritreans from their own territory in the southern Gash region in Eritrea by confiscating their livestock and other property;
- Continued to deport ethnic Eritreans from Ethiopia and dump them at unannounced border posts;
- Engaged in State vandalism to wilfully destroy private, commercial and public assets including schools, hospitals and other developmental installations in the areas under its control;
- Brought civilian "looting teams" from Ethiopia to ransack the property of villagers in the areas that fell under its occupation;
- Killed 239 civilians (121 in the southern zone and 117 in the western zone respectively) while causing the disappearance of 36 others. Its army of

occupation has abducted several youths between the ages of 9 and 14 in the southern zone and raped many women (the full report is being compiled by independent bodies).

It is against this dismal human rights record that Ethiopia is today falsely accusing Eritrea of perpetrating "violations of human rights" of Ethiopians living in Eritrea including detaining them in "concentration camps and slave labour!". These preposterous allegations are inspired by three motives:

- Ethiopia's unwillingness to receive its own nationals;
- Its desire to torpedo the peace process through unfounded excuses;
- Its desire to portray the Government of Eritrea as an equal violator of human rights with itself and thereby whitewash its crimes.

The facts are otherwise clear. Eritrea did not initiate, and has not followed in the footsteps of Ethiopia, to pursue a dangerous and shortsighted policy of ethnic cleansing. It is a matter of record that Eritrea took responsible measures, including through a parliamentary bill and public campaigns, to stem the inflammation of ethnic hatred and to ensure the respect of the rights of Ethiopians residing in Eritrea.

The massive population dislocation induced by Ethiopia's invasion has however compelled Eritrea to make arrangements for the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopians with the collaboration of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The overwhelming majority of these Ethiopians had fled their residences in Eritrean villages and towns in the face of the targeting of civilians by the Ethiopian armed forces. Obviously, there were also those who were not in possession of valid residence or work permits.

Eritrea has scrupulously adhered to the letter and spirit of human rights and humanitarian laws and strictly followed the procedures that govern repatriation. No property was confiscated; no house was expropriated; no bank account was frozen. There was no torture, degrading treatment, or any other form of abuse. It is to be understood that Eritrea has the right under human rights and humanitarian law to repatriate any Ethiopians with no valid papers in view of the fact that the Ethiopian Government unilaterally revoked the bilateral agreement which exempted each other's nationals from the standard requirements of legal residence.

Eritrea's responsible policy and record of the treatment of Ethiopians living in Eritrea has met the approval of credible human rights organizations and agencies. This policy will continue especially as both sides have signed an agreement on cessation of hostilities. On the other hand, it must be recognized that Ethiopia has an obligation to receive its own nationals, those who want to go back voluntarily as well as those who may have to be repatriated because they do not possess the necessary legal documents.

Eritrea will continue to make sure that the process of repatriation will be conducted in a manner that ensures the safety and dignity of those affected. To this end, it has sought, and will continue to seek, the active involvement of ICRC in the process through the provision of logistical support and escort. This has been made impossible in the past few weeks because the Ethiopian Government refused to cooperate, thereby blocking ICRC involvement in monitoring the process.